

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**CONSERVATION COVER
(Acre)
CODE 327**

DEFINITION

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover to protect soil and water resources.

PURPOSES

- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.
- Improve water quality.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on land to be retired from agricultural production requiring permanent protective cover, and on other lands needing permanent protective cover. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Species shall be adapted to soil, range site, and climatic conditions.

Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Use of invasive species shall be avoided.

Seeding rates and methods shall be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose (Use practice code 512 where applicable).

Planting dates, planting methods and care in handling and planting of the seed or planting

stock shall ensure that planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival.

Only viable, high quality and adapted seed or planting stock shall be used.

Legume seed shall be inoculated with the proper Rhizobia bacteria before planting.

Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species. Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for conditions at the site.

Vegetative manipulation will be accomplished by mechanical, biological, chemical methods, or prescribed burning, or a combination of the four. If burning is used alone or in combination with the other methods, Prescribed Burning (code 338) must be included as a planned practice. . All nutrients shall be applied following the nutrient management requirements in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat

Planting/Establishment

Grasses, forbs, and legumes shall be planted in mixes to encourage maximum plant diversity and ability to produce food.

Management/Maintenance

Methods used shall be designed to protect the soil resource from erosion.

Maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the reproductive period for grassland wildlife species. In Arkansas, this period extends from April 1 to July 15th.

Maintenance measures must be adequate to control noxious weeds and other invasive species.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be done on a “spot” basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

CONSIDERATIONS

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species. Where applicable this practice may be used to conserve and stabilize archeological and historic sites.

Consider rotating management and maintenance activities (e.g. mow only one-fourth or one-third of the area each year) throughout the managed area to maximize spatial and temporal diversity. Where wildlife management is an objective, a habitat evaluation procedure can be used to identify food and/or cover most needed by the targeted wildlife. Specific plantings and/or habitat management techniques for existing food and cover plants can then be selected to meet the prioritized needs of wildlife.

Use native species when available. Consider trying to re-establish the native plant community for the site

If a native cover (other than what was planted) establishes, and this cover meets the intended purpose and the landowner's objectives, the cover should be considered adequate.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. They shall include, but are not limited to, recommended species, seeding rates and dates, establishment procedures, and other management actions needed to insure an adequate stand. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, the Arkansas Agronomy Technical Note No. 1 or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Maintenance practices and activities should not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species. Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from annual weeds. Noxious weeds will be controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields.

Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for general weed control is not recommended. Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose.